

Appendix F



Erin Victory/TCI

Vegetation one year after a prescribed burn

Fire Management Program Guidance

Introduction

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” as stated in the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act (October 9, 1997).

The Role of Fire

Historically, natural fire and ignitions by Native American people played an important disturbance role in many ecosystems by removing fuel accumulations, decreasing the impacts of insects and diseases, stimulating regeneration, cycling nutrients, and providing a diversity of habitats for plants and wildlife.

In the heavily manipulated areas of the northeastern U.S. that role has been modified significantly. However, when fire is used properly it can –

- reduce hazardous fuels build-up in both Wildland-urban interface (WUI) and in non-WUI areas;
- improve wildlife habitats by reducing the density of vegetation, and/or changing plant species composition;
- sustain and increase biodiversity;
- improve woodlands and shrublands by reducing plant density;
- reduce the susceptibility of plants to insect and disease outbreaks;
- assist in the control of invasive and noxious species.

Wildland Fire and Management Policy and Guidance

In 2001, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture approved an update of the 1995 “Federal Fire Policy.” The 2001 “Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy” directs federal agencies to achieve a balance between fire suppression to protect life, property and resources, and fire use to regulate fuels and maintain healthy ecosystems. It also directs agencies to provide a management response to all wildfires, commensurate with values at risk, safety, and costs for suppression.

This policy provides nine guiding principles that are fundamental to the success of the fire management program. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity. The role of wildland fires as an ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process.

Fire management plans (FMPs), programs and activities support land and resource management plans and their implementation. Sound risk management is the foundation for all fire management activities. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, on the basis of values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives. FMPs and activities are based on the best available science. FMPs and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations. Federal, state, tribal, local, interagency and international coordination and cooperation are essential. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an ongoing objective.

The fire management considerations, guidance, and direction should be addressed in the land use resource management plans (for example, the CCP). The FMP is a step-down plan derived from the land use plans and habitat plans, with more detail on fire suppression, prescribed fire and fuels management activities.

Management Direction

Nomans Land Island NWR as part of the Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex is an uninhabited island approximately three miles southwest of Martha's Vineyard, the closest landmass. Without the need to protect life, property, and other resources from wildland fire, we would not make an effort to suppress wildfires, but would certainly monitor any wildfire as a minimum suppression response. Prescribed fire is often utilized in conjunction with chemical, manual and mechanical fuel treatments in an ecosystem context to protect federal and private property, for habitat management purposes. Given the absence of property to protect, the prevalence of remaining UXO on the island, access restrictions, and safety considerations, it is likely that fire management on the island would be largely restricted to prescribed burning. Fuel reduction activities, if any, will be applied in collaboration with federal, state and nongovernmental organizations partners.

Prescribed fire will be used as a management tool to promote and accomplish the goals set forward in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan:

- Protect and enhance Service Trust Resources and Species and Habitats of Special Concern.
- Maintain a healthy and diverse complex of natural community types comprised of native plants and animals to pass on to future generations of Americans.
- Conduct effective outreach activities to promote quality off-site wildlife dependent public use programs to raise public awareness of the Refuge and the Refuge System, and to promote enjoyment and stewardship of natural resources in the Cape Cod and Islands region.

All aspects of the fire management program will be conducted in a manner consistent with applicable laws, policies, and regulations. Nomans Land Island NWR will maintain a FMP to accomplish the fire management goals that follow (see Fire Management Goals). Prescribed fire, chemical, manual and mechanical fuel treatments will be applied in a scientific way, under selected weather and environmental conditions.

Fire Management Goals

The goals and strategies of the National Wildlife Refuge System Wildland fire Management Program Strategic Plan are consistent with Department of Interior (DOI) and the U.S. Forest Service policies, National Fire Plan direction, the President's Healthy Forest Initiative, the 10 year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan, National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Guidelines, initiatives of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council, and Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation operations.

The fire management goals for the Refuge are to use prescribed fire to meet the habitat goals and objectives identified in this CCP.

Fire Management Objective

The purpose of the fire management program is to use prescribed fire, chemical, and manual and mechanical treatment to:

- Ensure public and firefighter safety while protecting property and natural resource values from wildfire.
- Reduce the wildfire impacts to all resource management activities. Reduce the threats associated with accumulations of hazardous fuel loads in marsh and woodland habitats.
- Provide and enhance and protect habitats for state and federal endangered and threatened species and species of special concern.
- Provide, maintain, enhance, and protect feeding, resting, nesting and brood habitat that meet the requirements of migratory waterfowl, other migratory birds, and resident wildlife.
- Maintain health and vigor of marsh vegetation.
- Facilitate the control of invasive and exotic species.
- Increase habitat diversity in Refuge upland habitats.
- Demonstrate and educate the public about the role and benefits of Wildland fire protection and prescribed fire use in natural resource management.
- Maintain current ecosystem diversity within the landscape context, and contribute to the recovery and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem.
- Comply with state Air Quality Implementation Plans to protect public health and the environment.

Strategies

The Refuge will use strategies and tactics that consider public and firefighter safety as well as resource values at risk. Wildfire suppression, prescribed fire, chemical, manual and mechanical treatment methods, along with timing, and monitoring are described in more detail within the step-down FMP.

Prescribed fire burn plans will be developed for specific sites, following the interagency Prescribed Fire planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide (2006) template. Prescribed fire temporarily reduces air quality by diminishing visibility and releasing components through combustion. The Refuge will meet the Clean Air Act emission standards by adhering to the Massachusetts Air Quality requirements during all prescribed fire activities.

Fire Management Organization, Contracts, and Cooperation

Fire management technical oversight for the Refuge has been established in Region 5 of the Service, using the fire management zone approach. Under this approach, fire management staff has been determined by established modeling systems based on fire management workload of a group of refuges, and possibly interagency partners. The fire management workload consists of historical wildfire suppression activities, as well as past hazard fuels treatments. At this time, Nomans Land Island NWR is within the New England fire management zone, which includes all the national wildlife refuges in Massachusetts. The primary fire management staffing and support equipment are located at the Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex, and are shared among all units. All fire management activities are conducted in a coordinated and collaborative manner with the Refuge and other federal and non-federal partners. The fire management zone has also developed a close working relationship with the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, and the Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Upon approval of this CCP, a new FMP will be developed for the Refuge. The FMP may be done as an FMP that covers only Nomans Land Island NWR or an FMP that covers all the refuges within the Eastern Massachusetts NWR Complex.